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# SEA LETTER

## OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

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*Schooner MELROSE  
with deckload.*

# Christmas on an Atoll

by Captain Fred Klebingat



# Christmas on an Atoll

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"Time ticks" received by wireless were not known in the era of sail and the ship's longitude depended on the accuracy of the chronometer the vessel carried. Ships many days at sea and therefore not sure of their position would attempt to make a "landfall" before approaching their port of destination. A high island was preferred. For instance, vessels coming from the South Atlantic, and bound for the English Channel, would sight one of the high islands of the Azores. Then, comparing the true position of the ship (obtained by bearings of objects ashore) with the one obtained by celestial observations, they would deduct the error if any and were able to tell if the ship's chronometer had kept its rate of gaining or losing. If the chronometer had not maintained a steady rate of loss or gain — so many seconds a day, say — the navigator was able to compute this changed rate.

Experienced navigators, bound from a Pacific Coast port to Tahiti, would make a point to sight one of the islands of the Marquesas before nearing the low atolls of the Tuamotus or Dangerous Archipelago. But navigators of ships bound to Australia or Tonga or Fiji were not so fortunate; there were no high islands on their track when they entered the South Pacific. There were only the two wooded atolls, Rakahanga and Penrhyn Island. Approaching such an atoll you see the top of the palms peeping above the horizon when you still have ten or twelve miles to go.

The first landfall such a schooner might make was Malden Island, but careful navigators gave this crumb of land a wide berth. With no crest of coconut trees, it was far less visible than even Rakahanga or Penrhyn Island. Many tales are told of those shipwrecked on barren Malden Island — a guano island surrounded by erratic currents.

The coconut palms of Rakahanga and Penrhyn Island, as well as the pandanus and other shrubs and low trees, flourish in a soil of coral debris — the sand, gravel, and coral slabs that form the *motus*. The *motus* are small "islands" that build up every so often around the rim of the coral reef. The reef surrounds a lagoon. The *motus* are separated from each other by channels into the lagoon, some shallow, and a few navigable.

A mass of white breakers surrounds the whole — they break on the reef that created the island in the first place. The reef is a dangerous barrier to those who are foolhardy enough to try a landing. Brown Polynesian people dwell on these islands; they make a living off the sea. They are expert fishermen, swimmers and divers and can navigate the surf when no one else can.

Isolated as these two islands are, still they were on the track of those windships with their high deckloads of lumber that sailed from the Pacific Northwest to ports in Australia, the Fijis and the Tongas. Prudent skippers in charge of these vessels sighted one or the other to check the accuracy of the ship's chronometer.

While in command of the American four-masted schooner MELROSE I made a point of using these islands in the fashion I have described.

\* \* \* \*

It must have been at least thirty days since I had said goodbye to Mr. Henry, general manager of the Hastings Sawmill, which was owned by the B. C. Mills, Timber & Trading Co. of Vancouver, British Columbia. I had on board a full cargo of lumber for Morris Hedstrom Ltd., a big trading firm at Suva, Fiji Islands. The Red Stack tug SEA MONARCH had towed us to sea. The last humans we had seen were Captain Thompson and the crew waving, followed by three long blasts of the tug's steam whistle that said "farewell." With a wheeze and rumble of gears, the



Penrhyn Island, a low-lying atoll with a crest of palms. — Ernst Adermann, photographer





Towser, the ship's dog.

towing winch reeled in the steel towing hawser; Captain Thompson reached for the bell pull to order "Full ahead" and the swirling wake of the tug formed a wide arc as she changed course for Cape Flattery and home, rolling easily in the long westerly swell. In a half an hour she disappeared behind Tatoosh Island, the entrance to the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

Thirty days at sea is not long for those who sailed ships in the era of sail, but at that a sight of earth and green trees fills one with delight. We had to reef down for a southeast gale shortly after we had let go the tug. But then the wind turned to northwest, the sky cleared, the green of the coastal ocean turned to deep blue; and as we steered south, the northwest wind gradually hauled into the northeast trades. The gooneys, the brown albatrosses of the North Pacific, left us as we entered the tropics. The sky is somewhat hazy near the Pacific Coast with northwest winds, but this cleared and cumulus clouds sailed by overhead, throwing deep shadows on the blue sea as they went by.

A pair of tropic birds might now and then be seen, all white but for a spike of red tailfeather. With a raucous cry — "ark - ark" — they flutter nervously, high above the mastheads. As we near dangerous Malden Island, some booby birds might also meet us. They are master fishers and seldom venture more than a "bird flight" away from land. We will be on the latitude of Malden during the night, so to be safe I change the ship's course to west at sunset and resume the southwest course at sunrise. During the next night we pass to the west of Starbuck Island, low and barren, also worked for guano many years ago. Towser, the ship's dog, has been below all night. At sunrise she gets up on the poop, and, front paws on the rail, she snuffles to windward. She turns her head to look at me, as if to say, "Do you know there is land there? I can smell it."

It may have been two days more sailing when the palms of Rakahanga rise over the sea rim at dawn. The trade is blowing steady, and I set a course that will put the schooner close to the reef on the lee side. We may be lucky; there is always good fishing close to the reef. A wahoo or tuna, or maybe a dolphin, as seamen call the mahimahi fish, might mistake the white rag with the barbed hook on the troll line towing astern for a squid. The sea gets smooth as we get under the lee of the atoll.

The natives of the island also have seen us. It might have been months since Captain Viggo with the schooner TIARE TAPORO departed, and, day in day out, they have gazed at an empty sea devoid of any sail. They hasten to launch their canoes.

Several of the craft are visible ahead of us, as we near the village. We clew up the gaff topsails, and drop the spanker to ease the schooner's speed. The natives make their canoes fast alongside. The green coconuts they bring off are more than welcome — a fresh drink for us. They have plenty of them and pass these on board. They also have some shell necklaces for barter and maybe a pearl or two. One of them has brought off a small pig; I have to decline this. There is no room for a pig on a schooner's deckload. But their goods for trade are scanty; there is no fruit growing on most atolls. Bananas, oranges and mangos do not thrive on the coarse coral soil. The islanders are anxious to obtain denim overalls, tobacco, soap, matches and bread — and we are not parsimonious. Well satisfied, they board their canoes as we come out of the lee of the island. The schooner sets all sail as the natives wave goodbye. You can be sure that the MELROSE will be remembered, and I have suddenly become a friend of these simple folk.

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Two years had passed since I last sighted Rakahanga. The schooner MELROSE had been sold and I, her former skipper, was fortunate to land a job as third mate on the S. S. MELVILLE DOLLAR. The DOLLAR was a large freighter that had been built in China in World War I as the ORIENTAL. She was now engaged in the inter-coastal run. After we visited the east coast, the ship returned to San Pedro. This was in 1926. A friend said to me "Zane Grey wants a skipper for his schooner, the FISHERMAN. She is fitting out for a voyage to New Zealand and the Southseas to go sportfishing."

"Jobs are hard to get," I said to my chum, "and I landed this job on the MELVILLE DOLLAR without looking for it. I intend to stay."

"Write an application to Zane Grey for the job anyway," my friend says, "and see what happens; write a letter to-night."

"Alright," I replied, "I'll write from San Francisco."

I did, and the job was mine.

Zane Grey, noted writer of westerns, was then at the height of his fame. He was also an ardent fisherman with an obsession to land the largest and heaviest game fish ever caught. To do this he must travel to distant seas. Therefore he bought a suitable vessel to carry his boats and gear. This was the three-masted schooner yacht FISHERMAN, a former commercial schooner, built in Lunenburg Nova Scotia as the MARSHAL FOCH. The Nova Scotian builders had launched her in 1919, a vessel of nearly 500 gross tons. A pair of Fairbank Morse Co. engines had been installed by Zane Grey; these helped in light winds and made it easy to enter and leave ports. She carried four launches. Below decks there was a large tackle room with cases of fishing rods, reels of wire for leaders, cases and cases of fish line, fishing reels galore, many of them built to the author's order. The assortment of fishing gear and quantity would put most sportfishing gear stores to shame. The owners of Abercrombie & Fitch would have looked at this assortment of fishing tackle with respect.

But the author never travelled on his ship for long distances; he resorted to her only on the fishing grounds. So he said to me: "We are going to explore the seas around New Zealand and Tahiti for game fish, my party and I. I will go to New Zealand with the United Steamship Co. liner. So be sure to meet me at Auckland on January 22nd."

He continued: "And on the way to New Zealand, you may pass some islands where some worthwhile movie film and still photos can be taken. Don't hesitate. Just stop and take the time to make them." Then he handed me five thousand dollars to disburse for the ship. We shook hands, and with "I am sure you will have a pleasant voyage," my employer departed.

There were seventeen men in the crew of the FISHERMAN. That included the professional photographer and a radio man.

The ship's track passed near the dangerous Malden Island as we entered the South Pacific. But with a radio man this landfall was a different story. He provided time ticks to confirm my chronometer's rate. My observations were made under perfect conditions and there was no doubt as to the ship's position, so I did not hesitate to close with Malden. We sighted the atoll one day near noon. It was a beautiful day with a moderate breeze. The land was low land circled by a ring of surf. A lone palm and a few buildings of the settlement stood at the west end. The Cook



The schooner-yacht FISHERMAN at Auckland, New Zealand, on January 20, 1927.

islanders that worked the island for guano came off to visit the schooner. We slowed down, there was plenty of time.

Later on I heard that a short while after our visit, the island was to be abandoned, the guano was worked out. I did not think it worthwhile to make movies of guano collecting, so we sailed on after our visitors departed. Starbuck Island, a desolate atoll formerly worked for guano, was quite near, so going slow under easy sail we sighted it next morning after daylight. Ships must have been wrecked here, but there was no sight of them and such disasters must have happened long ago. There were few signs that humans had ever been here. Heat waves rose from this expanse of white coral. A high surf, misting as it rolled ashore, seemed to guard the place against anyone who wanted to invade this scene of desolation. A white beacon built of coral and some ruins of huts made out of the same material gave proof that man had been here, at least for awhile.

There was time to spare, so I shaped course for Rakahanga; I might see my old friends. It was now the hurricane season in the South Pacific. The sky became overcast and the wind shifted to northwest with rough seas, the usual weather at this time of the year and this part of the ocean. I watched the "glass" for something worse, but fortunately no hurricane developed.

We sighted Rakahanga about noon. With the wind in the northwest, the east side of the island was now the lee and so we steered for it. Natives in droves, with a dozen outrigger canoes, were hastening off to the ship. We reduced sail to make it easy for my island friends to come on board. They greeted me warmly. But in the group was a man I had not met before, a Caucasian. He introduced himself: "My name is Murray and I am the local trader." We talked about some men we both knew in the islands and where the FISHERMAN was bound.



Finally I said: "Christmas is near. I will see what I can do to remember it is coming."

Smithy, the steward, was standing quite near me and so I said, "Make up a parcel for Mr. Murray here. Cut off a nice steak and give him some onions and potatoes to go with it. I note you baked this morning; we should also give him a loaf of fresh baked bread and a square of our butter."

The steward hastened toward the chill room below, "Hold on a minute, Smithy," I said.

"Who else is on the island?" I asked Murray.

"Well, there is a crazy priest who wants to build a church," he replied.

"Smithy," I then said to the steward, "Make up a parcel just like that one for the 'crazy priest,' too!"

In a short while Smithy appeared from below with a sack in either hand. He passed these to Murray. "I am sure both of you will have a nice Christmas with this," he said.

As the ship neared the south end of the island, the sea started to increase, so Murray and my native friends said "Goodbye" in the Cook Island dialect. They cast off their canoes.

The wind had dropped quite light, so we set all sail. I rang "full ahead" on both engines and the Fairbanks Morse Co. engines started up with a roar and a cloud of black smoke from the exhaust pipes through the transom. The schooner gathered speed, the natives waved awhile and finally made for the shore. By nightfall Rakahanga was out of sight.

The weather turned bad. Rain fell in torrents at times. There were heavy squalls and it did not improve much until we reached the coast of New Zealand. The Auckland pilot came on board. It was morning on December 31st, we

dropped the hook on the Waitemata, the beautiful harbor of Auckland. The year 1926 was drawing to its end.

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Twelve years passed. I was now skipper of a little schooner-yacht called NAVIGATOR and her home port was Honolulu. She was owned by G. Harton Singer Jr. of Sewickley, Pennsylvania and also Honolulu. Singer was a man somewhat like the newspaper publisher Scripps, owner of the yacht OHIO, who was never happy unless at sea. Annually we made a voyage from Los Angeles to the South-seas. Returning from Tahiti and the Society Islands and bound for Hawaii, I would always call at Penrhyn Island, which I have described. The natives and their administrator are always hospitable to all visitors, yachtsmen or just traders. And no one could be more kind than the administrator, Captain Viggo Rasmussen (the natives used to call him "Papa Viggo"). Mr. Singer and his party always had a nice time, what with native dances and other entertainments.

It was on one of these visits that a native came on board and handed me a note. It said:

"Can you help me. I am the Catholic priest. I am suffering from diabetes. Have you some fresh fruit or vegetables to spare? I would be grateful."

Fruits and vegetables are plentiful on the high and volcanic islands in the South Pacific, but hard to come by on an atoll. The slabs of coral and sand tossed up by the sea onto the reef forming the motus are poorly adapted to horticulture. Only the coconut and the pandanus thrive in such poor soil.



The schooner-yacht NAVIGATOR at Traitor's Bay, Fatuhiva, in the Marquesas Islands, ca. June 1938.





The bustling waterfront of Papeete, Tahiti, in 1938, as seen from the deck of the two-masted schooner yacht NAVIGATOR. From a contemporary San Francisco newspaper: "G. Harton Singer Jr. Monday will dispatch his two-masted schooner yacht NAVIGATOR to New Zealand for a fishing and hunting cruise which will take the craft to numerous infrequently visited atolls of the South Pacific. Capt. Fred Klebingat will command the craft, accompanied only by a crew of six. After hunting in New Zealand for deer, moose, chamois and thar, the party will cruise leisurely back . . ."

— Ernst Adermann, photographer

Leaving Tahiti this time, we had visited Moorea, Huahine, Raiatea, and Bora Bora, all islands of the Society group. Consequently, although the NAVIGATOR was a small vessel, we were well stocked with bananas, oranges and limes, also yams and other root vegetables. We were sure a selection of these would be appreciated by the diabetic.

In my travels in the South Pacific I have met many that preached the "glad tidings" — men of all denominations. Some were blessed with worldly goods and lived in comfort, and others I saw existing in abject poverty. I have met many that only thought of themselves and still others who were only devoted to their faith. Be that as it may, I was sure that this priest, whoever he was, was in sore need of what we had on board. I loaded up two shopping bags with fruit and vegetables.

One of the crew took me ashore in the dory, to a little mole built out of coral. A bag in either hand, I stepped ashore. The trades rustled the palm fronds overhead. Myriads of land crabs scurried ahead of me, their pincers towards me, as in a defending position. In a grove of pandanus, a small house was visible.

The doors and winds were open to let in the cooling trades. I entered. The place was bare except for a cot. At a plain table sat the priest. He was a man in his sixties, a little on the stout side, his hair somewhat thinned. He wore a neatly trimmed beard on a face that showed premature age. His face brightened at the sight of me.

He rose. I motioned him to sit down and placed the two filled bags of fruit near him. I sat down on the only other chair in the room.

"They are yours, Father," I said, motioning to the sacks. His thanks were profuse in a voice heavily accented. He said, "What is your name?"

"Klebingat," I said.

At that his face lit up with joy, as if he recalled something.

"Kle-bin-gat — Christmas — Oui! Oui! Fee-she-mawhn," he exclaimed.

Then it dawned on me that this must be "the crazy priest who wanted to build a church" on Rakahanga.

He had not forgotten what he called the best Christmas he ever had, so he told me. His name was Joachim Kerdal, a native of Belgium, and he had long suffered from diabetes.

"We are bound to Honolulu," I said. "I am sure the Mission there will be glad to hear about you and see that you get the needed medication."

"I belong to that very same, the Sacred Heart Mission," he said. "Please see Father Vincent, and tell him of my condition." I assured him that I would look up the Mission when I got to Honolulu.

The NAVIGATOR sailed the next day. We called at Christmas Island and the resident radio man and his wife came on board. There was good fishing, but next day we went on our way.



Our yacht berthed at Pier Seven, Honolulu. After entering the ship at the Custom House, I looked up the Catholic Mission, which was then on Fort Street opposite the Blaisdell Hotel.

Father Vincent seemed to be the business manager. I told him about the plight of Father Kerdal at Penrhyn Island.

"We have written Father Kerdal repeatedly to give up his post, and come here for medical attention. But he will not listen . . ."

"He wants to build a church," I said. "He hopes that treatment with insulin will stay the disease and make him able to carry on. There is a native medical practitioner on the island who surely can take care of him."

"It is too bad that he will not listen," said Father Vincent sternly. "We could give him the best of care here. The building of the church can wait."

Then his severe tone relented. "The New Zealand man-of-war ACHILLES will visit the island soon. So I will telegraph Auckland to ship an adequate supply of insulin. Also other things Father Kerdal will need. It should get there before Christmas.

A letter from Father Kerdal some time later told me that his medicine did indeed arrive before Christmas.

\* \* \* \*

And did the good priest build his church?

Well, World War II was declared a few years later. I became skipper of a T-2 tanker called APACHE CANYON. Loaded with fuel oil for the U.S. Navy, I crossed the tropical South Pacific many a time loaded, bound west, and in ballast bound to Balboa, Canal Zone, for another cargo. I was never close enough to sight Rakahanga or Penrhyn. When I was in that part of the world I always thought of Father Kerdal, the FISHERMAN and the NAVIGATOR

and a couple of Christmases that I had been able to make better for an unselfish man.

I learned that the Lord was kind to his servant, Father Kerdal. Under the care of a capable native medical practitioner who administered the insulin he lived many a year. Enough time, indeed, to build the church. The walls of his edifice of coral lime rose slowly above the undergrowth. Captain Viggo Rasmussen, the administrator, died, but the "crazy priest" carried on.

Many Christmases came and were gone. One day Viggo's old schooner, TIARE TAPORO — now under Captain Andy Thomson\* — landed the corrugated iron for the roof and the stained glass windows that kind souls had donated. And finally a bell.

It took time to roof the church and to fit the windows. Slowly the steeple rose above the swaying palms. They built an altar of native woods and inlaid it with mother of pearl shell. They hung the bell in the belfry.

Come a day when the natives, all in their best finery, slowly wended their way towards the edifice. All the congregation seated, Father Kerdal in his vestments says Evening Mass. The congregation sings — as only islanders can sing — "Silent Night" in the native tongue.

I am glad that the schooner MELROSE and the schooner yacht FISHERMAN and also the little NAVIGATOR contributed their "mite" to all this.

Amen.

At the age of 90 I can say that my own days in the Southseas are done. No more will I sail the great Pacific in the heart of the trades. Most of my friends down there have passed on. Never again I will make an island landfall as day dawns, nor see the palms of Rakahanga lifting above the horizon's rim.

But it has been a good life. I wish you a Merry Christmas.



Hakahetau, in the Marquesas. To check their chronometers, navigators preferred to make a landfall at a high island. — Ernst Adermann, photographer

\* Nordhoff and Hall, residents of Tahiti and authors of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, dedicated that book "To Captain Viggo Rasmussen, Schooner *Tiare Taporo*, Rarotonga and Captain Andy Thomson, Schooner *Tagua*, Rarotonga, Old friends who sail the seas the *Bounty* sailed."



# Some Old South Sea Hands



Oscar Nordman set up in business for himself in Papeete. He supplied ships with vegetables and other stores; here he is with his truck. He used the name "Oceanic" a lot in his enterprises, and also "Sonoma." He had been baggageman for the Oceanic Line on the old MARIPOSA, a brigantine-rigged steamer, and later he was on the SONOMA. His father was cook with Captain von Dahlern.

The building in the background is typical of the Papeete waterfront. It was the store and headquarters of Societe Commerciale de l'Oceanie and also the German consulate before the first world war. The S.C.O. company was a German enterprise — a million-dollar outfit, took up a whole block. It was a South Sea island store that could supply anything from a needle to an anchor. Masts for a schooner. Any kind of foodstuff. They owned schooners to transport their goods to the various islands. And in return they bought copra and pearls. After World War I the French took over the building.

This photo was made about 1928. Oscar was leasing a part of the building for his saloon, called the Sonoma Bar. Over the bar was a sign: "Ask Oscar. He knows." The trouble was he knew too much. He started buying and chartering old schooners, loading them with bogus cargo, then sinking them and collecting the insurance. He would load

"gasoline" that was just water, "sugar" that was just sand, autos without engines. The insurance company was suspicious of course, and finally he sank a schooner in water that was too shallow, only 20 fathoms instead of 100. So the insurance company sent down divers and found him out.

He was convicted and sentenced to Devil's Island, but Oscar had political influence. He managed to stay in Tahiti, and his wife went to work for him, finding lawyers. I always admired his wife, Margaret. A good dressmaker. She got lawyers and got Oscar out in about three or four years.

—F. K.



*Captain Fred Klebingat and Mr. Bunkley in front of Maxwell's store, Papeete.*

This photograph was made outside of the S.R. Maxwell & Co. store in Papeete about 1929.

I am sitting there with Mr. Bunkley, the general manager of the store.

I had the picture made to send to Capt. von Dahlern of



# Memories of Captain Klebingat

## *Those Old Happy Days In Tonga*

the S.N. CASTLE, because this bench is where he used to sit, talking to Bunkley. A couple of old South Sea hands, both of them.

Bunkley told me once how he came to be down there in the first place; it must have happened before the turn of the century.

He was in San Francisco and out of a job. He heard about a job open with Crawford (one of the oldest Papeete firms) to go as bookkeeper to "TAHAYTEE". That is the way Bunkley understood it. He had no idea where Tahaytee was. They sent him aboard the GALILEE. He thought that he was bound for the island of *Haiti* in the West Indies. A week at sea, he found out that he was bound to *Tahiti*, an island he did not even know about.

Bunkley knew nothing about bookkeeping either, but before he left San Francisco he bought himself a little book on this subject for which he paid 50 cents. This seems to have provided all he needed to know; as long as I knew Bunkley he was General Manager of S.R. Maxwell & Co.



A Tahitian girl. — Adermann Collection

(A letter from Miss Mildred H. Free, published in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1957)

So Captain Klebingat is still on deck! Now, there is a man with real material for a book. He probably is one of the few men left who spent all his life in sail.

Captain Klebingat came along Tonga way with the MELROSE, in 1925, when I was a member of the Morris Hedstrom staff there. He brought a cargo of lumber and oil and I think he made two or three trips. But that first trip nearly ended in disaster.

After unloading at Nukualofa, the MELROSE set off for Niuafu'ou, to pick up a return load of copra for San Francisco; and our head manager and a branch manager decided to take the opportunity to go along on a visit of inspection. They took only enough food for a week, but had in addition a few supplies for Ramsay, the "Tin Can Mailman," including two cases of whisky — presumably to revive his gaspy throat after swimming out to the TOFUA.

The MELROSE got blown south to the Kermadecs, and was lost for six weeks. By the time they got to Niuafu'ou there was very little left to eat — and still less of Ramsay's whisky.

It was about this time that the MANUKAINIU got blown from Tonga to the New Hebrides, with a couple of natives on board, a couple of coconuts, and a lot of hope. No one seemed to think that it was such a dreadful thing as it might appear to-day. They were lost for three months; but natives apparently were used to that sort of thing.

Another time when Captain Klebingat was in Tonga he had a near mutiny on board. He was an immense man — kindly, strong, with something of the personality of Van Luckner — a born leader. For crew he had, as you can well understand, some of the worst that can be picked up in San Francisco; and they played up a bit in Tonga. Being months at sea, coming from San Francisco, may have added to the trouble.

One night, when the captain came on board, as soon as he stepped on the deck a seaman hit him with a belaying pin.

Of course, the police came into this, and Captain had to make a statement about the matter. He dictated the statement to me (I was the stenographer in the firm); and it was short and to the point, something on these lines:

"When the master boarded the ship, the said seaman came at the said master and struck him with a belaying pin (looking at me with a twinkle in his eye), said master defending himself."

This was a masterly understatement for, as a matter of fact, the said master hit that fellow so hard that he was unconscious for two days, and I think the ship sailed without him.



On his next trip, there happened to be in Nukualofa harbour a small yacht, containing a New Zealand family. They lived on the sea in this yacht and tripped around from place to place — a delightful life, but one that could not be lived to-day, with the form-filling-in and currency restrictions and other things that make a traveller's life a misery.

The family consisted of a father and mother, a young boy of about twelve, and a beautiful girl about seventeen, with a bounteous mop of hair, the colour of ripe wheat on the Darling Downs, in Queensland, a New Zealand complexion and a sun-tan, made by the sea and the sun and not got out of a bottle as to-day.

She apparently was the "crew" — I do not remember if the small vessel carried any other crew — and the minute she sailed into Captain Klebingat's horizon, it was a case with him.

The boss said to me one day: "Captain Klebingat says he is in love with that girl, and is going to come back and marry her." True enough, a couple of months later, he sent us a letter to be forwarded on to her (the yacht had gone, long since), with the remark: "My hat is still in the ring, as you see."

Sure enough, he did go back the following year to New Zealand and marry her.

Then, what about all those other colourful characters that flitted across the scene in Tonga in the late 'twenties — old Ned Sandys, from Nomuka (a direct descendant of an early Archbishop of York, of that name) who used to come to town in his cutter, and draw a couple of hundred pounds, which he took away in a little canvas bag, and then proceed to go to the Tonga Club for a festive night; but Ned was never known to lose that money, which he eventually took back to Nomuka to buy copra.

And then there was Ross Murray, who was merry one dark night, and jumped on a white horse which happened to be roaming around. This animal apparently belonged to the Queen; for, feeling the unaccustomed burden on its back, it promptly bolted and threw Ross Murray off in the Palace yard.

All those colourful and happy days are gone now in Tonga; people come down for a couple of years on a contract, and never get the atmosphere of the place like we did in the old days.

This Christmas issue of the *Sea Letter* was produced by the National Maritime Museum staff and funded by the National Maritime Museum Association, Thomas B. Crowley, President.

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Fair wind, and Captain Fred Klebingat takes his ease on the cabin companion as MELROSE begins her voyage.

— Ernst Adermann,  
photographer

